

**READERS' RESPONSE TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN KHALED
HOSSEINI'S *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS* NOVEL**



Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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PUBLICATION ARTICLE


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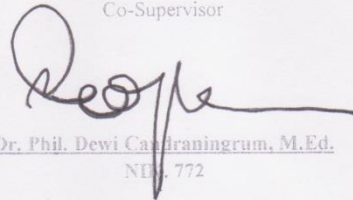
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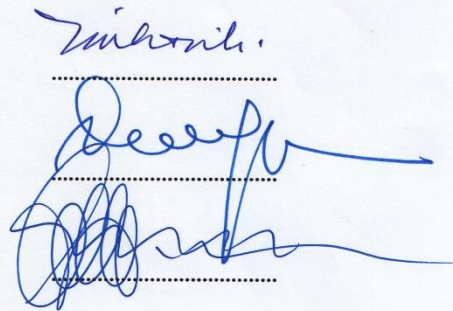
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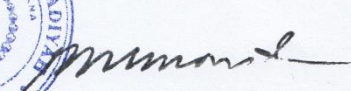
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Readers' Response to Child Marriage in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui tanggapan pembaca terhadap novel karya Khaled Hosseini yang berjudul *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Teori yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah teori *Reader Response* dari Richard Beach. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif. Data dari penelitian ini terdiri dari dua macam yaitu data primer dan data sekunder. Data primer berupa respon pembaca terhadap novel yang diperoleh dari situs Goodreads. Sedangkan data sekunder diperoleh dari sumber lainnya seperti buku-buku sastra, penelitian-penelitian terdahulu, jurnal, artikel, internet, dan lain sebagainya yang terkait dengan penelitian. Teknik pengumpulan data dengan cara analisis dokumen dan teknik analisis data menggunakan analisis isi yang terdiri dari tiga tahapan yakni reduksi data, penyajian data, dan pembuatan kesimpulan. Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mengetahui isu apa saja yang muncul dari novel tersebut, faktor yang mempengaruhi pembaca untuk memberikan pendapat mengenai isu tersebut, bagaimana faktor-faktor tersebut terkait dengan pembaca, dan alasan pembaca memberi tanggapan yang demikian terhadap isu-isu yang muncul. Setiap pembaca memiliki keunikan dan perbedaan dalam memberikan tanggapan mengenai isu yang muncul dalam novel. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa latar belakang budaya, pengalaman hidup, dan gender mempengaruhi masing-masing pembaca dalam memberikan tanggapan mengenai isu-isu yang muncul dalam novel tersebut.

Kata kunci : Readers' Response, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Abstract

This study aims to determine the readers' response to the novel by Khaled Hosseini entitled *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The theory used in this study is the Reader Response from Richard Beach. This study used qualitative research methods. The data of this study consists of two kinds, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data is the response from the reader to the novel obtained from the Goodreads website. While the secondary data obtained from other sources such as literary books, previous studies, journals, articles, internet, and others related to the study. The technique of collecting data using document analysis and technique analyzing data using content analysis consisting of three stages of data reduction, data display, and making conclusions. This study was conducted to find out the issues raised in the novel, the factor that influences the readers, how are the factors related to the readers, and the reason why the readers raise the issues in their response. Each reader has the uniqueness and distinction of providing feedback on the issues that appear in the novel. This study shows that cultural background, life experiences, and gender influence each reader in responding the issues rose from the novel.

Keywords: Readers' Response, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many literary studies always focus on the novel and its content for study, whereas there is another interesting one that can be used as a source aside from them, that is the readers. The readers are an important component in the continuity of literary work since they who enjoy, judge and utilize the literary works, even the writer who knows everything about the novel is considered as anonymous. The role of readers who have not been highlighted is very interesting to learn, so that is why this study uses reader's reaction to Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel and the factors influencing them to give such opinion as for the research data. It is a phenomenal novel proven by its existence until now. The existence of the novel cannot be separated from the role of the reader. This novel has also been widely used as a study object with a variety of approaches. Most of the studies that have been carried out raised issues of feminism in accordance with the content of the novel.

The study of Afghan women position focused on how society treats them and highlights the discrimination and violence in domestic life and during the war (Shapiro, 2010; Ayalew, 2012; Gordan and Almutairi, 2013; Silima, 2013; Shabanirad and Seifi, 2014; Shameem, 2014; Sruthi, 2014; Soraya, 2015; Suhada, Elfiondri, and Dahlan, 2016; Joyia, Farooq, Ghafoor, and Gull, 2017; and Suhana, 2017). In gender equality and equity to explicate the women's struggle and their resilience to face the hard living conditions. The purpose of the struggle is to achieve the equality not only rights but also obligations (Stuhr, 2011; Yawari, 2011; Wulandari, 2012; Singh, 2013; Philip, 2016; and Sebastian, 2016). In the core of linguistics, Mansourabadi and Karemnia (2012) were using Critical Discourse Analysis, meanwhile Murtafi, Nababan and Djatmika (2017) using stylistics translation. In the term of structuralism, Putri (2010) studied intertextuality and Kazemiyan (2012) studied the rhetorical vision inside the novel. To give novelty to the research on the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, this study will analyze the response of the reader. The specific characteristic of this study compared to the previous ones giving focus on the reader, not on the novel.

Reader response is a study which focuses on reader or audience reaction towards particular literary work. The response can be the best strategy to know the reader's thought, belief, experience, and hope toward literary work. Rosenblatt in Becker (1999: 104) stated that the writer does not have the power to define the text meaning, it also the same that text is not independently to creates certain meaning. Thus, the text meaning is given by the reader when they read the text. Reader response also rejecting the idea that there is a single fixed meaning adhere to every literary work. This theory holds that the individual creates his or her own meaning through a transaction with the text based on personal associations. Because all readers bring their own emotions, concerns, life experiences, and knowledge of their reading, each interpretation is subjective and unique.

There are five perspectives on Beach's reader response. They are textual perspective that focuses on how readers take advantage of their knowledge of the texts or genre conventions in responding the certain traits. Experiential perspective emphasizes the attribution of reader's experience in constructing the text. In this perspectives, the reader involves the identity of the texts such as characters, visualize images, which relate to the personal experience. Psychological perspective provides the clarification of cognitive processes or unconscious readers and variation processes accordance with the uniqueness of

the individual's personality and development levels. Social perspective asserting the influence of social context on the relationship between reader and text. Cultural perspective focused on the role, attitudes, values, and historical cultural context of the readers in creating their response (Beach, 1994: 8-9).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The type of this study is literary studies that using document analysis. This study use document review for collecting data. The data consists of two kinds, primary data and secondary data. Primary data are taken from Goodreads website in the form of response of the reader. The secondary data obtained from other sources such as literary books, previous studies, journals, articles, internet, and others related to the study. The technique of data analysis in this study using qualitative analysis that consists of three phases namely data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 11).

3. RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Main Issues

There are 45 issues raised by the text review, but this study will only take 20 issues which have relation to women's issue. The twenty women issues cover discrimination, abusive/violence, hope, endurance and courage, gratitude, child marriage/arranged marriage, struggle, culture, oppression, empathy, patriarchy, freedom, sacrifice, women's right, misogyny, empowerment, subjugation, equality, feminism, and gender relation. This study will analyze the issues using reader response theory by Richard Beach.

The reviewer of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel in Goodreads totally 44.030 reviewers from 2007 till October 4, 2017, but this study will take only 300 (one page consists of 30 reviewers) reviewers to be analyzed. The limitation in assessing data related to the system restrictions of Goodreads, where its search engine only gives access to ten pages of each category. As people know that there are three categories in Goodreads such as newest, oldest, and default; meanwhile this study takes the data from the default category. The oldest and newest category is not selected because when selecting one of the two categories, the results will be different and the data obtained only come from the same year range and this is deemed less relevant and less supportive. Meanwhile, the data default category is chosen, since all the reviews are the best among others. It can be seen from the acquisition of "likes" on each review was given by the reviewer. It indicates that what the reviewers have to say in their writings or opinions represent the opinions of other readers, even if they do not write the opinions and only represented with their like.

For the review analysis, this study only takes 250 reviewers that use English and Bahasa. Meanwhile, for the rest 50 reviewers do not use because they use their own language. In under certain conditions, there are reviewers who give a double opinion on the different issue, so that the amount of the reviewers may increase. The amount of readers' opinion towards the issues as follow:

Table 4.1.1. The Amount of Reviewers' Opinion Based on Gender

No	Issue	Female	Male	Unidentified	Amount
1	Discrimination	26	9	0	35
2	Abusive / Violence	28	6	0	34
3	Hope	21	8	1	30
4	Endurance and Courage	22	6	0	28
5	Gratitude	22	3	1	26
6	Child Marriage / Arranged Marriage	18	7	0	25
7	Struggle	16	7	0	23
8	Culture	15	8	0	23
9	Oppression	11	4	0	15
10	Empathy	12	1	0	13
11	Patriarchy	8	5	0	13
12	Freedom	10	2	0	12
13	Sacrifice	11	1	0	12
14	Women's Right	9	1	0	10
15	Misogyny	7	2	0	9
16	Empowerment	3	2	0	5
17	Subjugation	4	0	0	4
18	Equality	3	1	0	4
19	Feminism	4	0	0	4
20	Gender Relation	2	1	0	3
Total		252	74	2	328

The data shows that the most of women's issues are discrimination. There are twenty-six female reviewers and nine male reviewers that gave opinions about discrimination. It is the biggest result among other issues. Most of the reviewers disagreeing with discrimination, especially for the women in Afghanistan. For them, women and men are equal, women and men are facing the same difficulties of life, especially in conflict areas. There should be no distinction in treating them. Men have their rights and nothing more, meanwhile, women also have their rights and nothing less.

3.1.1. The factors that influence the readers to give opinion

There are three factors which influence the readers in giving opinion toward the issues raised by *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel. The factor such as the difference of the cultural background of the readers, the experience they have, and their gender. Cultural background covers the country, education, job, the way of life, politics, economy, society, and religion. The experience mostly influenced by the reader's age and in what time they are living. The experience then affecting the critical thinking of the reader, since it generates the values of life gained during the life of society. The gender that consists of female and male have different sensitivity to certain issues affecting their response raised from the novel, especially related to women's issues.

3.1.2. Describing factors related to the readers

This study found that the factors and the readers are related to each other. The background got from the data of the readers are country, age, and gender. The table below shows that comparison of the continent with the number of readers of the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Table 4.1.2. The Amount of Readers' by Continent

No	Continent	Gender			Total	%
		Female	Male	Unidentified		
1	Antarctica	1	0	0	1	0,33
2	Africa	10	18	0	28	9,33
3	America	58	17	0	75	25,00
4	Australia	6	0	0	6	2,00
5	Europe	59	13	1	73	24,33
6	Asia	59	28	6	93	31,00
7	Unidentified	18	2	4	24	8,00
Total		211	78	11	300	100

Based on the table above, the readers from Asia is the highest percentage that is 31,00 %. It followed by America 25,00 % and Europe 24,33 %. This comparison number is influenced by the author origin country. The author origin country and the setting of place in the novel is in Afghanistan. It influences the Asian reader to read the novel since there is a similarity in the region that is the same from the Asia continent. It is seen from a continental perspective.

This comparison does not necessarily give the absolute result. For example, it is impossible that Australia only has six readers. This condition caused of the limited access to the Goodreads website. And judging that the number of novel readers is still increasing until this moment. For readers from Antarctica and Africa, the number of readers who are few because the countries on the continent are difficult to access this novel.

This study shows that the United States (USA) is the most reader among others country. There are 21,33% readers that giving a review of the novel. This condition influenced by the easiness of accessing novel, the multicultural society that has critical thinking towards literary work and the issues, curiosity and passion to gain more knowledge about Afghanistan and the social life of its people.

Khaled Hosseini who now as the United States citizen, wrote the novel as a redemption of his guilt because as an Afghan he does not feel bitterness when it comes to fighting Soviets, clashing with the Mujahidin, or feeling the tyrannical atrocities by the Taliban. In addition to his personal feelings, the author also assumes that it is his duty to voice the wishes, hopes, and even the changes desired by Afghani women after thirty last years.

The cultural aspects such as education, religion, culture, politic, economy, job, and the way of life also influence the reader to give opinions. Even though there is no provide a number, it can be seen from the opinion delivered from the readers related to the certain, issue. Besides that, there are some reviewers who mentioned their jobs such as journalist, writer, activist, and lecturer. For example, Marianne Elliot, an author and activist from the United Kingdom that ever stayed for six months in Afghanistan has her experience living with Afghani women and compare to her life and others women in the United Kingdom. She

gave her opinion based on her experience combined with her cultural background and her job as an activist so that she can deliver an opinion that the women's right in Afghanistan need to protect as well as of human rights.

The experience of the readers also influences them to build an opinion related to women's issue that very interesting to be studied. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are very phenomenal novel. From the beginning of publication in 2007 until ongoing 2018, the number of the readers and rating still increase. The difference in the number of readers each year is influenced by what events occur during the current year. The events that influence the reader, for example, the US presidential election in 2016, where Hillary Clinton suffered defeat from Donald Trump. For American women especially, Hillary is a new hope for the representation of women in the political world who can represent their voices to convey their aspirations, at least so.

The age of the readers also influences their maturity in giving opinion related to the sensitive issue. It is also combined with the experience the readers have as long as the life journey. The most readers of the novel are aged of 21 – 30 that is 89 readers or 29,67 %. This age is suitable to understand and comprehend about life problems and the transition from adolescent to mature person. In this age people still, have high interest in reading the novel and using the internet. The similar age of the character in the novel also influences the readers to show their empathy. In the age of 71 – 80 there is lack reader since this age people more interested in daily news from the newspaper rather than reading a book or novel. They are also not an internet user, so even though they read the novel, they just keep their opinion for their selves or just discussing with their group. Another probability is they include in the unidentified age since they did not give information about their age in detail.

Gender of the reader also affecting the readers in deliver opinions based on their emotional feeling. The different of each country and gender in giving comments are differentiated by the condition of the country. For example issue of child marriage is not important in India, but in the United States, this is a very important issue. This is because the United States citizen disagrees with the child marriage since it can disturb the child health (genital health), it also prevents them to be more productive when they are still young and disturb their education. Different from India, that the child marriage as the usual tradition there. So, the culture holds the important role in shaping reviewers. Besides that, from a gender perspective, the female is in high amount than male ones. Since they have sympathy or empathy feeling for each other.

The analysis results that women are more sensitive toward the issues emerging from the novel. Besides that, it can be said that the modern countries have a higher awareness of equality, freedom and anti-discrimination beside the developing countries. In this case countries in America, Europe, Australia, and Antarctica including as a modern country compared to developed countries in Asia and Africa.

3.1.3. The reason reader give response in the novel

The reason of the readers giving such response to the certain issue, since they are the witness, the victim, or have the experience with such issue. This study found that discrimination as the most commented issue by the reviewers. There are 35 readers who delivered an opinion about discrimination. The most readers are disagreeing towards discrimination happened to the

Afghani women. The opinions as a form of protest towards the patriarchal culture still exist and strong. In addition, the emotional connection and gender influence of the readers raised the issues since they argue and disagree with the women discrimination depicted in the novel as a mirror of real life. The other reason is that now female and male have the equal rights and opportunity to be anything and to create something. Besides that, the women's right needs to have protection to keep their existence and their safety.

Other reviewers also delivered the opinion that this novel is the propaganda. She felt that Hosseini is purposefully being emotionally manipulative and she did not appreciate it. Meanwhile, the other reviewer said that If she was a conspiracy theorist, she might call the novel as anti-Afghanistan propaganda. Because she was not a conspiracy theorist, she did not actually think the novel as anti-Afghanistan propaganda. It indicates that the different opinion among reviewers is based on the reviewer's experience and cultural background as well as gender sensitivity.

3.2. Discussion

This part is the discussion of the data and the main issues analyzed in the previous section. The preceding analysis shows that reader response applied by the readers to *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel is a cultural reader response. It can be seen from the reviewers who give the opinions or comments related to their background living such as cultural background, experience, and gender. Cultural reader response holds that the psychological, subjective, reader's thoughts, beliefs and experiences play a greater part in shaping the meaning of work above the text itself.

The analysis before shows that based on continental perspective Asia is the highest reader amount, meanwhile, from a country perspective, the United States is the country with the most reader among others. This condition is influenced by the country where the readers' living. Asia as the location of Afghanistan, where the readers' feel have the emotional connection with the Asian people. Then the United States as the place where equality of rights between female and male is having the high appreciation.

The readers' appreciation in 2007 when the first time novel released are high. It shows by the number of the novel's reader. The events happened during the years also influence the reader in giving response. The age of the reader also affects the readers' opinion. They who have similar age, having the strong empathy. The readers' in aged 21-30 as the high number. Most of the readers are the internet users so that they are can make a review of the novel on the Goodreads website.

The readers from different countries are having a different urgent issue to be commented. It such the American readers think that the issue of discrimination, abuse, patriarchy, misogyny, child marriage, etc, as the important issue than the issue commented by Australian readers encompasses equality and subjugation. It is also seen in the Indonesia readers who assume that the issue of discrimination, abuse, struggle, and child marriage as the important issues than the hope and gratitude from Egyptian readers. The phenomena also appear that Indian female readers are very sensitive toward child marriage since India has the highest number of child brides in the world. As Travers (2017) said that 47% girls in India are married before their 18th birthday.

The readers criticized the fanatic ideology of Muslim women that give themselves to their husband. They think that by doing this, it is equally giving devotion to God. Since the condition, the mental of women become lesser than men and has been rooted in a very rigid social culture. The women who do not comply with this standard considered as unfaithful. It is reflected in Mariam character. She always obeys her husband words and not complains of his treatment, even if he committed violence against her. This is commented as a subjugation by readers from Finland and Australia. In 2016, Finland was voted as second country and Australia in tenth place that appreciates equality between women and men (Adams, 2017). That is what affects them giving opinions about subjugation, where only men having control over women.

The twenty issues about women raised from *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel can be simplified become one general big issue, which one issue can be part of the others. The general issue of this study actually is the patriarchy that become readers' attention to be commented. Patriarchy is the concept that divided into the right/freedom, rule, and participation. The most women issues raised from the novel majority are part of the right/freedom term, and the rest belongs to the rule and participation. The result of regrouping term can be seen in the diagram below:

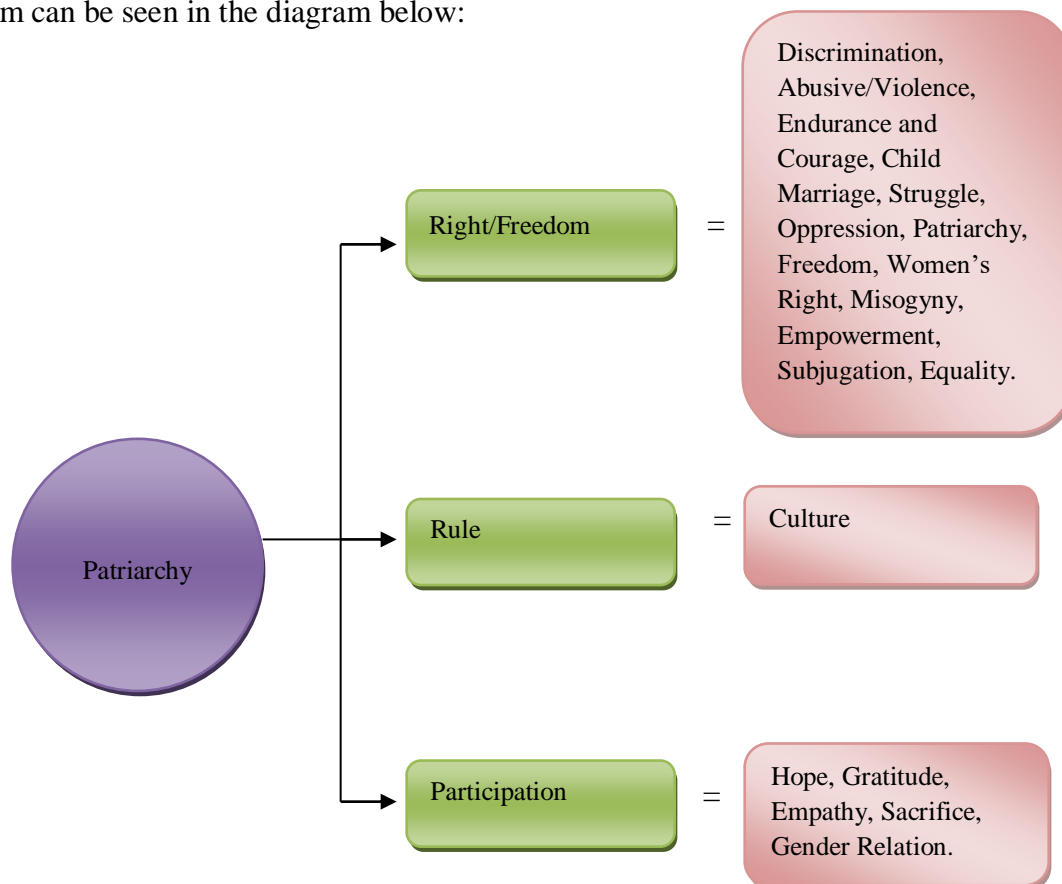


Figure 4.1 The Grouping of Women's Issues

From the previous discussion shows that the modern countries have a higher awareness of equality, freedom and anti-discrimination beside the developing countries. In this case countries in America, Europe, Australia, and Antarctica including as a modern country compared to developed countries in Asia and Africa. As stated before that the reviewers

giving opinion are naturally influenced by their experience. Besides that, the social culture of each reader also affects them in giving opinion towards the issue raised from the novel.

They get the values during witnessing the event or feel the incident like that happened to the character in the novel. From that values and experience then they can give opinions in such way. This fact shows that there is a relation between values and the social-historical background of the readers or reviewers when they giving response to a certain literary work.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation and discussion before this study formulate four conclusions: first there are 45 issues raised by the novel, but this study only take 20 issues related to women's issue such as discrimination, abusive/violence, hope, endurance and courage, gratitude, child marriage/arranged marriage, struggle, culture, oppression, empathy, patriarchy, freedom, sacrifice, women's right, misogyny, empowerment, subjugation, equality, feminism, and gender relation. These issues then analyzed using reader response theory by Richard Beach.

The second is three factors that influenced the reader to give opinions toward issues raised by the novel. The factors are the cultural background of the reader, the readers' experience, and gender. The cultural background covers the country, education, the way of life, the occupation, the society, religion, politics, and economy. The readers' experience influenced by age and the era they are living. Meanwhile, gender consists of female and male shows that the female readers' awareness of the women's issues is higher than the male ones.

The third, the factors and the readers are influenced by each other. The cultural background, life experience, and gender are part of the uniqueness of the reviewers. Those things that cause the meaning of a text to be varied. Cultural background shaping the reader's way of thinking that supported by life experience. Life experience has obtained the values of life that determine the level of criticism of a reader in giving an opinion. Experience also distinguishes between one reader and another in giving opinions, they can ally and also may cons. It depends on their experience, cultural background, and gender.

The fourth, differences in cultural background, experience, and gender make the readers respond primarily to women issues that appear in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel. The experience as a victim or a witness makes the reader react in response to these emerging issues. The cultural differences, worldviews, and ways of life are also reasons for the reader to respond to the issues. Those experiences then make the readers raise the issue as a form of protest towards the patriarchal culture that strongly and still exist. In addition, the emotional connection and gender influence of the readers raised the issues since they argue and disagree with the women discrimination depicted in the novel as a mirror of real life.

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